

The preacher, who is retired, said to the congregation at Wesley Heights, where the average age is in the mid-eighties, "Regardless your age, regardless your limitations, remember the call of Abraham, which is also a call to you. Hear what God said to an old, frail, man!" "I will bless you SO you will be a blessing."

He then teased the idea with them, asking what they were doing with God's blessing, asking if they were a blessing to others, which is the essence of the call to Christian discipleship, a call to share God's love.

What a guidepost for effective ministry with and to older adults! How infrequently (usually out of a misguided sense of compassion) we do not challenge the older adult with whom we are ministering to seek ways to touch the lives of others with God's blessing! We want the person to feel loved and cared for, neglecting the reality that knowing real eternal love and caring is most often found as we find ways to care about others. It is not as easily discovered when we turn inward, focusing solely on ourselves.

Faithful ministry with older adults, as with any age group, is about challenging others to also be in ministry to others. I often say to residents, who are frail and sickly, and feeling unnecessary and forgotten, how are you still able to show love? Making phone calls to someone as lonely as you are? Praying for others? Writing a note to another shut-in? Sitting with the new resident at dinner? It is important that we not only challenge, but that we suggest doable ways to rise to the challenge.

Whether you be ministering in the context of a local congregation, a hospital, a nursing home or a private home, this guidepost is good to remember and so easy to forget.

A while back I was speaking with a daughter of one of our residents who was constantly doing "everything I can for my Mom."

"It may be a good idea if you let her do some of these things herself. She is more than able and is beginning to withdraw from others in the community."

"I know, but she has spent her life doing for others, I want to do everything for her in these later years."

"Even if that is part of the reason she is withdrawing? Even if your doing so much is causing her to feel unneeded and unnecessary?"

We do not mean to isolate the older adults, especially one with obvious frailties, yet we do when we do not challenge them to continue to do whatever way they still can to be a blessing!

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